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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE UNITED NATIONS DISENGAGEMENT OBSERVER FORCE

(for the period from 18 May to 18 November 1996)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report gives an account of the activities of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) during the last six months in pursuance of the mandate contained in Security Council resolution 350 (1974) and extended in subsequent resolutions, most recently resolution 1057 (1996) of 30 May 1996.

II. SITUATION IN THE AREA AND ACTIVITIES OF THE FORCE

2. During the period under review, the cease-fire in the Israel-Syria sector was maintained without serious incident and the area of operation of UNDOF remained calm.

3. UNDOF supervised the area of separation by means of fixed positions and patrols to ensure that no military forces were in it. The Force also carried out fortnightly inspections of armament and force levels in the areas of limitation. Liaison officers from the party concerned accompanied the inspection teams. As in the past, both sides denied inspection teams access to some of their positions and imposed some restrictions on UNDOF's freedom of movement.

4. In September and October there was a period of tension between Israel and Syria amid public speculation about the possibility of armed conflict. Tension has since subsided, following assurances by both sides through the intermediary of other Governments. During that period, the level of forces and armaments in the areas of limitation on both sides remained well below the ceiling established by the disengagement agreement of 1974.

5. UNDOF assisted the International Committee of the Red Cross with facilities for mail and the passage of persons through the area of separation. Within the means available, medical treatment was provided to the local population on request.

6. The Force Commander and his staff maintained close contact with the military liaison staffs of Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic. Both sides cooperated with the Force in the execution of its tasks.

7. As of November 1996, UNDOF comprised 1,042 troops from Austria, Canada, Japan and Poland (465, 188, 31 and 354 troops respectively), as well as 4 United Nations military observers detailed from the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO). In addition, UNDOF was assisted by the 73 UNTSO military observers of the Observer Group Golan (OGG). Major-General Johannes C. Kosters of the Netherlands continued as Force Commander. A map showing UNDOF's deployment is attached.

III. FINANCIAL ASPECTS

8. By its resolution 50/20 B of 7 June 1996, the General Assembly appropriated to the Special Account for UNDOF an amount of $32,254,900 gross for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997, based on an average strength of 1,036 troops and a continuation of its existing responsibilities. The assessment of the appropriation, which is equivalent to $2,687,908 gross per month, is subject to the decision of the Security Council to extend the mandate of the Force.

9. Unpaid assessments to the Special Account for UNDOF as at 31 October 1996 amounted to $64.1 million. Total unpaid assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations amounted to $1.8 billion.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION OF SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 338 (1973)

10. In deciding in its resolution 1057 (1996) of 30 May 1996 to renew the mandate of UNDOF for a further period of six months, the Security Council also called upon the parties concerned to implement immediately its resolution 338 (1973) and requested the Secretary-General to submit, at the end of the period, a report on the developments in the situation and the measures taken to implement that resolution.

11. The search for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East and, in particular, the efforts undertaken at various levels to implement Security Council resolution 338 (1973) were dealt with in my report on the situation in the Middle East (A/51/543), submitted in pursuance of General Assembly resolutions 50/22 A and B of 4 December 1995.

V. OBSERVATIONS

12. UNDOF, which was established in May 1974 to supervise the cease-fire called for by the Security Council and the agreement on disengagement between Israeli and Syrian forces of 31 May 1974, has continued to perform its functions effectively, with the cooperation of the parties. The situation in the Israeli-Syrian sector has remained quiet and there has been no serious incident.

13. Despite the present quiet in the Israeli-Syrian sector, the situation in the Middle East continues to be potentially dangerous and is likely to remain so, unless and until a comprehensive settlement covering all aspects of the Middle East problem can be reached. I hope that determined efforts will be made by all concerned to tackle the problem in all its aspects, with a view to arriving at a just and durable peace settlement, as called for by the Security Council in its resolution 338 (1973).

14. In the prevailing circumstances, I consider the continued presence of UNDOF in the area to be essential. I therefore recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of the Force for a further period of six months, until 31 May 1997. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has given its assent to the proposed extension. The Government of Israel has also expressed its agreement.

15. In making this recommendation, I must draw attention to the serious shortfall in the funding of the Force. At present, unpaid assessments amount to some $64.1 million. This sum, comparable to twice the current annual budget of UNDOF, represents money owed to Member States that contribute the troops who make up the Force. I appeal to all Member States to pay their assessments promptly and in full and to clear all remaining arrears.

16. In conclusion, I wish to pay tribute to Major-General Johannes C. Kosters and to the men and women under his command. They have performed with efficiency and devotion to duty the important tasks assigned to them by the Security Council. I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Governments contributing troops to UNDOF and to those that provide the UNTSO military observers assigned to the Force.